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Just a Lucky So and So

The Story of Louis Armstrong

by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by James Ransome

*A joyful tribute to the virtuoso musician and buoyant personality
who introduced much of the world to jazz*

A Discussion and Activity Guide

Discuss Big Ideas

- How have African Americans contributed to our society?
- How does our past affect us today?
- How does personal conflict make us stronger?
- What problem-solving strategies can individuals use to manage conflict and change?
- Why is it important to have a role model?
- Why is music such an integral part of the human experience?
- How does music communicate a message?

Read/Listen to “Just a Lucky So and So.” Discuss the following.

1. What are the central ideas and themes in the story?
2. Discuss the theme of “having a dream.” How does this theme relate to Louis Armstrong?
3. How does the author develop this theme throughout the story, including the thoughts, actions and feelings of Louis Armstrong? Find examples from the book.
4. What role did luck play in the life of Louis Armstrong?
5. What lesson about your own life can you learn from the themes of the book?
6. Why is the title contradictory to what was happening in the life of Louis Armstrong as a young boy? Find examples from the story.
7. What is truly important to Louis Armstrong? What does his attitude toward life say about him as a person? How can a person’s attitude change the course of their life?
8. What does this quote from the story mean: “I say never worry what the other fella has, as long as you’re having fun in your own way.” Why is that statement meaningful?

9. At what points in the story do you realize that Louis has an interest in music?
10. Why was Louis sent away? Find words from the story.
11. Why was Louis told that he could not participate in the band at the Colored Waif's home for boys?
12. What changed for Louis at the home for boys? Do you think he would have been a successful, famous jazz musician if he was not sent away?
13. How did Louis manage conflicts in his life? What decisions did he make that changed his future?
14. Who were some of Louis Armstrong's inspirations?
15. What were Louis Armstrong's contributions to the Jazz Age and to society?
16. How does the author use figurative language to create meaning and tone in the story? Find examples.
17. Look through the illustrations in the story. Find information that you were able to get from the pictures and not the text. How do the illustrations enhance meaning and tone?

Research, make connections, apply knowledge

1. How does this theme of having a dream reoccur throughout history? Why? Conduct research using evidence from various primary and secondary sources.
2. How can literature and music capture the mood of a certain time period?
3. In what ways have people used music to express their values and describe their experiences?
4. How do music and history influence each other?
5. How does culture affect music?
6. How does one musical style influence another?
7. What made jazz different from other styles of music was "improvisation." Discuss how this relates to Louis Armstrong in the story.
8. What inspires someone to create a piece of music?

9. Research the life of Louis Armstrong. Create a presentation using audio and visual aids. Include:

- Date of birth/place of birth
- Family information
- Early childhood information (where he grew up, anything special that happened to him at this time)
- Family influences
- Schooling information
- Marriage, kids
- Contributions—what is he known for, and how did he accomplish this— what was his path to success?
- Some popular songs credited to this artist
- Time period affected by this person (what years did he play, compose, or perform?)
- Problems faced
- Connection to your life
- Death date/place of death
- In your opinion, how did Louis Armstrong impact the society we live in today?

10. Using the internet, find the lyrics from the song. Compare and contrast the song lyrics to the book and write about why you think Lesa Cline-Ransome chose ***Just a Lucky So and So*** for the title of the book.

11. Why are you lucky? Compose a song describing why you are a “lucky so and so.”

12. Research the origin of the song, “Just a Lucky So and So.” Listen to the song played by various artists. Create a CD cover.

Common Core Standards in This Guide:

RI.4-5.1, 2, 3, 4, 9

W.4-5.4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

SL.4-5.1, 2, 4, 5

L.4-5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6